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This booklet delineates many elements for organizing and developing educational programs for preschool and kindergarten children. The primary goals of such programs are given as (1) socialization, (2) development of basic learning and language skills, (3) preparation for the regular school experience, (4) establishment of motivational systems, and (5) stimulation of self-expression. A sample daily schedule of activities is presented in the booklet. Also enumerated are possible centers of interest into which the classroom can be divided. One is reminded that children with special needs will require special programs. Because of the new emphases on parent involvement in the education of their children, programs to improve communication between school and home are discussed. Also discussed is the increasing interest in improving the quality and quantity of program personnel. The booklet presents some ideas on the nature of the problem and possible resolutions. In conclusion, guidelines for the evaluation of early childhood education programs are suggested. (WD)

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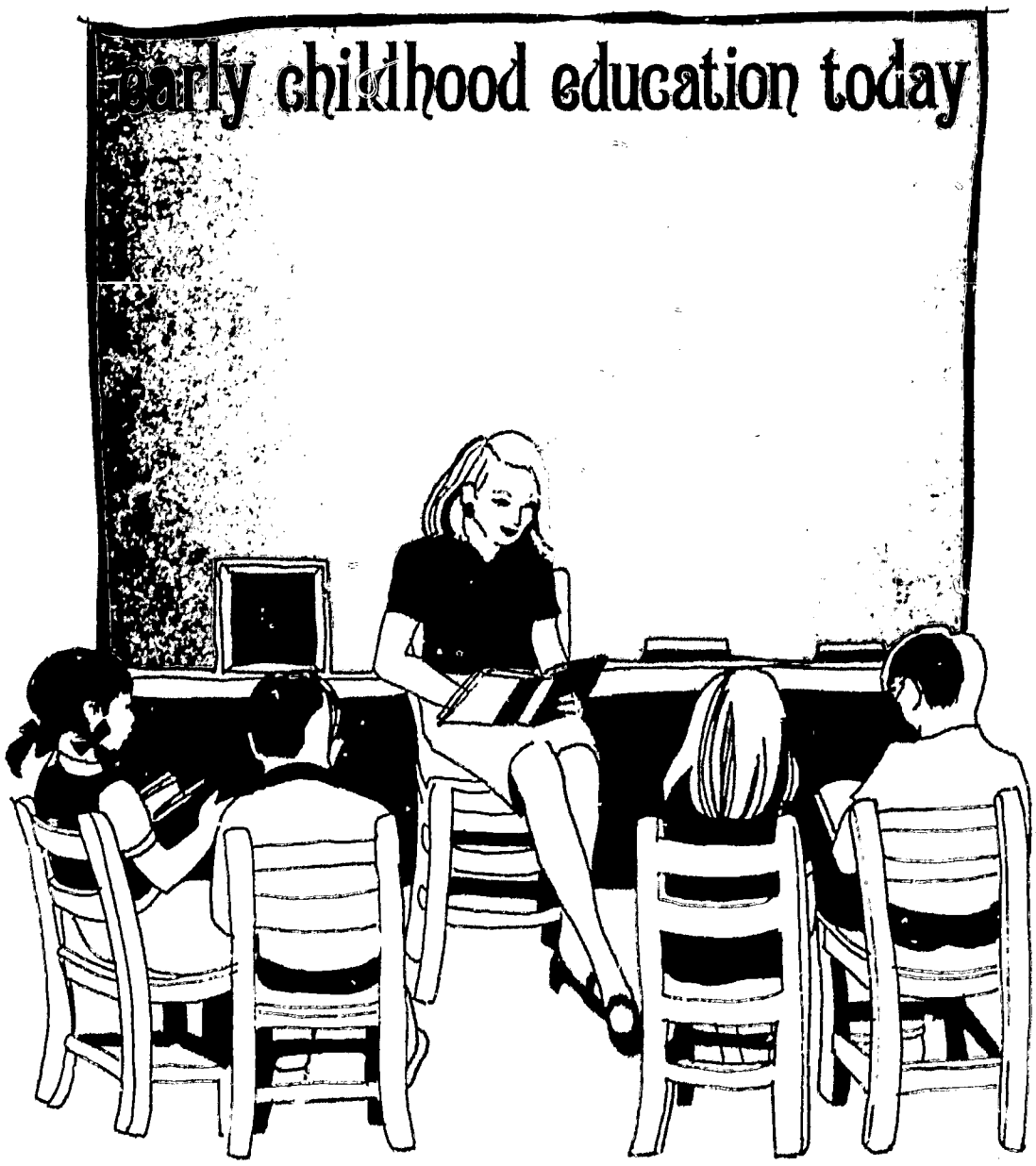

early childhood education today

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Preface

THE ASCD Elementary Education Council is a productive one. Under the chairmanship of President-Elect Alexander Frazier, it has demonstrated its sensitivity to the urgent issues and problems facing educators throughout the country. More important, it is an action-minded council in seeking ways to help the membership in coping with these problems. Its latest effort is timely. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TODAY, prepared under the direction of the task force chairman, Bernard Spodek, spotlights attention on the growing significance of education for the very young and wisely emphasizes that, "Early childhood education is coming to be seen less as a privilege and more as an individual right and possibly even as a responsibility which society owes its children."

Dealing with the nature and needs of the young learner, critical issues that have plagued the proponents of early childhood education in attempting to "sell" their convictions to administrators, lay people, and legislators have been soundly analyzed.

Having established an undisputable case for early childhood education, the booklet proceeds with an exceptionally broad range of "helps" in organizing and developing sound education for the very young. Personnel for staffing programs and parent involvement are sections of particular value.

The members of ASCD asked for guidance from within the profession in meeting the needs of early childhood education. The Elementary Education Council has responded generously.

June 1968

MURIEL CROSBY
President 1968-69
Association for Supervision
and Curriculum Development

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Introduction

THE confusion that has confronted many school systems and teacher education institutions in trying to deal intelligently with the demands made upon them by the unexpected and very rapid development of programs in early childhood education is familiar to us all. The present booklet is an outgrowth of a need expressed by members of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development for guidance from within the profession.

Here will be found guidelines to the development of nursery and kindergarten programs. Here too is help in understanding such relevant matters as teacher preparation, parent programs, and evaluation. Under the direction of the task force chairman, Bernard Spodek, the statement has evolved from a set of draft papers presented to a small panel in October 1966, for discussion and reaction, through a process of revision to its now completed form.

The members of the ASCD Elementary Education Council wish to express their appreciation for the commitment of the task force in following through on this process. Of course, we also wish to express our belief that this statement will be widely useful to members of the Association.

June 1968

ALEXANDER FRAZIER, *Chairman*
ASCD Elementary Education Council

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Background

IN THE United States, much of the development of group programs for young children has taken place outside the public schools, with nursery schools, kindergartens, and day care centers organized by philanthropic agencies, private enterprises, and colleges. While kindergartens have been a part of some public school systems for many years, only recently has there been a drive to make kindergarten education available universally and to extend public education to children below age five. The impetus of this movement has been in part an outgrowth of Operation Head Start and similar federal programs; yet a broad base in support of early public education has been developing from a variety of sources.

Because of the diversity of support for early childhood programs, a range of terms has been developed to characterize them. The terms *nursery school, kindergarten,* and *day care center,* for example, at one time represented programs for young children that were quite different from one another in practice as well as in theory. Present programs under these three categories have so much overlap, both in their activities and in the assumptions that undergird them, that the differentiation becomes significant only in organizational terms.

The kindergarten has become primarily a program for five-year-old children, often within the public schools. Some kinder-

gartens operate for a full day, although most of them run for half-days only. The two- to three-hour program contains both structured and free activities with attention paid to such areas as language, music, art, dramatic play, physical activity, science, social learnings, and mathematics.

The nursery school differs from the kindergarten primarily in terms of the age of the children it serves. The nursery school provides activities for three- and four-year-olds. (Few schools today serve children below age three.) While the organization of activities may be similar to that of the kindergarten, the content of these activities is modified and greater emphasis is placed upon meeting the physical and emotional needs of younger children.

The program of the day care center contains many of the activities of the nursery school and kindergarten. These centers, however, are open for extended hours, often from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., to meet the needs of working mothers and "problem" families. In addition to educational activities, day care programs actually care for the child in a broad sense. Food services are provided, as well as opportunities for rest and unstructured play. In the better day care centers, social services and health services are available to augment the care the child receives in the home and the center, and to help integrate the child's total experience.

Traditionally the day care center has served the poor; the nursery school has served the more affluent; and the kindergarten, when a part of public education, has served all children. This pattern is changing today with day care centers being established in middle-class suburbs to serve the needs of more affluent working mothers, nursery school programs being established for disadvantaged children, and public schools developing programs for varied populations and even moving into an extended school day. At the same time, there is developing a general feeling among educators and the lay public that early education is not merely a social convenience or an antidote for poverty. There is also a feeling that existing arrangements for the provision of early educational experiences, which rest heavily upon parental responsibility, are inadequate. Early childhood education is coming to be seen less as a privilege and more as an individual right and possibly even as a responsibility which society owes to all children.

This subtle shift is a result of changes in basic concepts about early experiences and their impact on human development as well as of reassessment of the experiences most young children have outside the school. Broadening the responsibility of the schools

to include the young child raises a host of issues about organizational patterns, the kinds of programs that are most appropriate for the young child, and the relationship of these programs to the child's home and to his total school career—issues which will be explored in this report. These concepts are related to assumptions held about the young child and his developmental patterns, the context within which children are developing today, our concept of the good life, and the relationship between the achievement of the good life and the kinds of opportunities for experience which children are provided in school.

The Urban Context

Much has been written about the shifts in the social context in which young children are reared today. Changes from rural to urban and suburban living and from an extended family to a nuclear family have had consequences for child rearing patterns and the nature of the opportunities afforded to the young child.

The experience of the nursery school director in any middle-class suburb will attest to the fact that many children are enrolled because of the absence of available playmates for them in their immediate home neighborhood. The child living in the high-rise section of the city, whether in an expensive apartment house or a low income housing project, may face the same lack of easy access to playmates. The decreasing size of families has also created a need to seek opportunities for a child to be with other children. All this has contributed to the nursery school's being viewed primarily as an agency to support social relationships among children. In addition, the decrease in the number of extended families has limited multiple mothering and placed a heavy burden on the mother as the only adult responsible for the child.

Such social needs provide a valid reason for organizing children into groups, but a "play group" experience does not meet all the needs of young children with which the nursery school is concerned. Changes in the child's life have created additional needs. The young child has been removed from contact with basic life processes and from contact with a range of phenomena which would allow him to gain an understanding of the world in which he must live.

We have segregated the world of the family from the world of work through the establishment of bedroom communities and

suburban neighborhoods. The young child has been kept from the world of work by this segregation as well as by the fact that there is no room for children in the world of work. He lacks not merely oportunities for identification with male models, but also opportunities to understand how things are grown or created and how people are related to roles and institutions.

Even the organization of the home, with its increased emphasis on prepared goods and automated devices, provides less and less of an opportunity for the child to develop the concept of causal relationships or to make generalizations about phenomena.

Segregation of childhood from these many phenomena is compounded by the segregation of the child from the world of people. Our living patterns order people on the basis of race, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, and age to the point where young children seldom meet people different from themselves or their parents within the context of their home and immediate environment. In addition, relatively large segments of our society have been excluded from the majority culture, with members of minority and majority groups rarely having natural access to one another.

With these shifts in the life patterns of children, there is clearly a need for an additional acculturating agency to influence the child's early life. The nursery school and the kindergarten, when broadly conceived, can play an acculturating role by providing experiences that bring the child into contact with the wider world of things and people and help him develop ways of ordering his world consistent with those accepted by the larger society.

Readiness for School Learning

Until recently it was accepted practice to begin formal schooling for most children at about age six. Since most schooling was reading-oriented, the child could not be adequately taught until he was old enough to learn to read. Even where kindergartens were a part of the public school system, they were traditionally considered as a vestibule to the school, providing the child with a period of adjustment in preparation for his entry into first grade.

We have discovered, however, that much that is significant is learned prior to age six and that rather than being the beginning of learning, reading is the culmination of a series of learnings that begin at the time the child starts to speak, some four and one-half years before his entry into first grade. The fact is that many children do not succeed in achieving these prior learnings and therefore

cannot fully benefit from instruction in the primary grades. This has led to widening support of proposals for early schooling for children from restricted populations, such as the disadvantaged or the handicapped, and increasingly for all children. If the prerequisite learnings that enable children to achieve the goals of primary schooling can be provided early in group settings, then programs of prevention may supplant programs of remediation for many children, and more children will be assured success in school.

Children's Needs

Early childhood education programs have often been justified because they meet the developmental needs of children. Each activity of the nursery school or kindergarten is supported by reference to its relationship to the natural patterns in which young children grow. While young children do have developmental needs, the degree to which these needs can be identified specifically is questionable. Moreover, various patterns of development can probably be supported by a wide range of activities and organizational approaches within the child's life.

The nursery school or kindergarten does not provide a natural setting for children. Such arrangements provide highly artificial situations that have emerged as a result of social invention. However, they use naturalistic methods and activities often derived from the study of children. In addition, there is room for initiation and modification of activities by the children.

Rather than simply following human development, an effective nursery or kindergarten program supports maturation. The young child's development is largely a function of the interaction between basic maturational patterns and encounters with the environment. Thus the nursery school or kindergarten, by creating a favorable environment, helps to support the child's development and influences its direction.

Needs of Special Populations

While preprimary programs are not provided for all children in all communities, they are often recommended as important experiences for children from special populations. The Head Start program is supported because it provides preparation for school for those children who are not adequately prepared in their homes and

neighborhoods. Other programs of early preparation also are supported for retarded children, for deaf children, and for children with other learning handicaps.

While special programs are easily justified on the basis of social need, the availability of such programs does not eliminate the desirability of early educational programs for *all* children. Care must be taken also that claims made for special programs be realistic. Early childhood education programs can achieve legitimate goals, but they are not magical solutions to all the problems of childhood, nor are they in themselves an antidote for all inadequacies of home and school. Programs for young children should be articulated with both the home experiences of the child and his later school life. Education is not a short-term process.

Many Purposes of Early Childhood Education

It should be evident that schools for young children are organized to serve many needs. The flexibility and breadth of a good nursery or kindergarten curriculum provide for these needs without distorting the life style of the young child. Nursery schools and kindergartens are developed to achieve the following goals:

1. *Socialization.* The young child who is ready to leave his home environment is ready to learn to live with different groups, and to develop ways of coping that are appropriate for varied situations. He will learn to respond to different authority figures and to a variety of rules and regulations that are situation-bound. The nursery school and kindergarten experience can provide the young child with opportunities for learning these skills and behaviors.

2. *School readiness.* School readiness can be conceived in two different ways: readiness to function in a school setting and readiness for learning of school subjects. The first type of readiness is similar to and perhaps a part of the socialization process already defined. The young child will also learn a range of behaviors and relationships appropriate to his new role as pupil. The nursery school and kindergarten can provide experiences to help the child learn skills for dealing with information and symbols which are basic to later academic learning.

3. *Motivational systems.* The young child is self-centered and needs to become aware of and sensitive to others. He will

learn that what others think or feel is important. At the same time he needs to learn to value socially acceptable ways of behaving. The child, therefore, must learn to value these educational activities and the rewards of learning.

4. *Learning skills.* The young child is learning to make meaning from his perceptions of the world around him. This is a process that involves questioning, information gathering, interacting, organizing data, and generalizing. These actions occur when the child is by himself or when he is with others. Opportunities to develop independence and self-direction in learning activities in the nursery and kindergarten years can provide a strong foundation for continued success in learning.

5. *Language skills.* Most children come to school already having mastered the basic structure of the English language and having acquired an extensive speaking and listening vocabulary. The nursery school or kindergarten will continue the language learning of the young child by helping him to learn situation-appropriate language, vocabulary, and both informational and aesthetic uses of language. For children who have not achieved adequate language skills, such learnings take on great significance as a basis for the later learning of reading.

6. *Self-expression.* While language is an important expressive mode for children, there are other valuable media for expression. Arts and crafts, music, and bodily movement are all used as a means of self-expression by the child. Self-expression also requires a degree of self-awareness and understanding. In the nursery school or kindergarten the child can take steps in learning to understand himself and his world.

These important goals of education are not served exclusively by early childhood education. They remain the goals of education as the child continues through school, although later childhood programs emphasize them less. These goals also can be achieved in the home. The nursery school or kindergarten does not claim exclusive rights to them. Yet just as primary schools are organized to achieve literacy for all children, even though reading can also be taught in the home, nursery schools and kindergartens are organized so that these goals can be achieved more effectively, and so that learning opportunities will be available to all children irrespective of whether their parents have the time or the ability to provide learning activities on their own.

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Issues About Learning

MOST people agree that young children can learn many things. There seems to be less agreement, however, about the most appropriate circumstances to support learning and about what the content of early learning ought to be. A range of positions can be identified in the field.

At one extreme, there are those who propose that much that has been taught at a later period in life can and ought to be learned in the early childhood years, at least under certain specified conditions. From this position come programs for early reading as well as programs that bear greater resemblance to those of later elementary or early secondary years than to the traditional nursery school or kindergarten. The "responsive environment" of O. K. Moore with its reading program for two-year-olds and the Bereiter-Engelmann preschool program for disadvantaged children seem to represent this point of view.

At the other extreme are those early childhood educators who are generally opposed to organizing school programs for specific learnings and who support the notion that young children should learn only those things for which they have a particular bent as . own by their "natural" interests. Nursery or kindergarten programs reflecting this point of view may have elaborately inviting environments, but teachers are admonished to allow the child to

set his own pace and make his own choices in activities and seldom to interfere. This position has often been mislabeled the "child development point of view." Most educators of young children take positions somewhere between these two extremes, using the interests and motivating forces within children but intervening in the child's activities in a variety of ways to facilitate learning.

In assessing the learning potential of early childhood programs, one must come to grips with a variety of issues, some of which are discussed in this section.

Readiness and Early Learning

The ability of the child to profit from some form of instruction has been termed *readiness*. While this term is most often heard in conjunction with primary reading instruction, it can be conceived of in relation to any form, content, or level of learning. Readiness may consist primarily of motivational states or a desire to learn or may be thought of as based mainly on prior learning. However, the term "readiness" as applied to early childhood education refers primarily to maturation.

An adult may be mature enough to drive a car but may not benefit from driver education because of a lack of desire, a fear, or a feeling that driving is an unnecessary skill. No amount of maturing will ready such a person for instruction in the rudiments of driving until the fear is overcome or the need for the skill is felt. Similarly, an elementary school child may not be able to benefit from instruction about fractions or the multiplication process. But in this case also, maturation may not play a significant role. In the early childhood years, because the young child is in such a rapid stage of development and because much of school learning requires a basic maturational level, the concept of school readiness rests more heavily upon maturation.

Teachers have to deal with children in the classroom who display a broad range of readiness for school learning. If a primary grade child is judged not yet able to benefit from reading instruction, the teacher's way of handling this is sometimes to postpone reading instruction for that child. Kindergarten retention is often seen as the solution to problems of readiness. The postponement of instruction for a month or even a year may provide the child with time to mature to the appropriate level at which instruction would be profitable. The assumption of this solution is that since school programs and maturational rates are both constant and

immutable, the one factor that the teacher can manipulate is time. From this point of view, increasing the amount of time provided for instruction or postponing instruction will improve the fit of the child to the educational system. Ilg and Ames, in their book, *School Readiness,* develop this point of view.

By contrast, some recently established programs, such as Head Start, are based upon a different concept of readiness. Rather than suggesting that children be held out of school for a period in order to allow them to mature, children are given opportunities for school experiences designed to create a readiness for school learning. Readiness is not conceived of solely as a maturational phenomenon but more as an interaction of maturation and experience. Readiness can be developed through providing opportunities for experiences that contain the elements of learning prerequisite for school success. This position represents a significant change in the posture of early childhood education, but it does not do away with the necessity for maturation for certain kinds of learning.

Play and Learning

Since the development of the kindergarten, over a hundred years ago, learning for the young child has been conceived of as occurring through various activities and through the manipulation of instructional materials, be they Froebelian "gifts," Montessori apparatus, or unit blocks. As nursery schools and kindergartens developed in the United States, teachers became more concerned with using the natural play activities of children as a learning medium and less concerned with systematic manipulation of specific didactic apparatus. Play came into its own as a learning device in the 1920's and has continued to be included as part of the nursery school or kindergarten schedule of daily activities.

In the past decade, suggestions have been made that play is frivolous and has no place in a program to support early learning. Critics suggest that the content of children's play is entirely fantasy and that, even when reality-oriented, play is too time consuming and inefficient as a learning device for use in a short-term educational program. While play may be useful as a socializing tool, the argument continues, it is not suitable for a program which stresses intellectual goals.

An analysis of play activities in a good nursery school or kindergarten classroom will demonstrate that most of what is included is not fantasy oriented. Rather the young child uses play

activities to help him restructure his known world into meaningful elements. The traditional "doll corner" will contain equipment that allows children to play out the roles they observe in family life. Often the teacher will include hats, dress-up clothes, and other artifacts that allow children to play out the roles they observe in the world of work. Supermarkets, buses, barbershops, and a host of other settings are devised by the competent teacher to support children's learning. The interaction of children in these settings also supports the development of language skills and increased vocabulary.

Likewise the manipulation of blocks, puzzles, lotto games, and a host of other play materials found in the classroom have learning possibilities. Whether or not these possibilities are realized is a function of the teacher's ability to guide learning as well as the child's readiness. The keen observer will quickly become aware that social interaction is occurring and that the intellectual skills of information processing are developing in the rich play environment of the classroom.

To the uninitiated, play activities may seem less efficient than formal verbal learning. Yet more than time and cost are involved in evaluating a learning activity. The benefits to be accrued are the first consideration. Children in a play curriculum are learning concepts and also the strategies for developing concepts. They are learning social skills and means of self-expression at the same time that they are learning intellectual skills and information. The achievement of multiple goals from the same activity makes play a more efficient learning medium than it is often judged to be.

Language and Early Learning

Teachers generally spend a considerable amount of time in language activities in nursery schools and kindergartens. Such activities include "sharing" or "show-and-tell," discussions, and story reading. In addition, varied informal language activities are encouraged during play and at other times.

Language becomes important in the early years both as a support to other learning and as a learning goal in its own right. The use of verbal mediation helps children in learning better concepts and skills. Children develop an extended vocabulary as they learn the words that represent the many new things they are meeting. The structure of a child's language is important because

the structure of his thinking is closely related to his language. As a child learns the logical aspects of language, he is also introduced to its aesthetic elements. The beauty of the spoken word as an expressive tool is something that children need to experience early in life. Since the key time for oral language learning seems to be in the first years, early childhood teachers should support language learning in many ways.

Structure in the Learning Program

One of the controversial issues in early childhood education programs is the role of structure. Programs may be labeled poor because they are "too structured." On the other hand, if children do not seem to be learning in school, this may be seen as a result of "lack of structure."

Actually all programs have some structure, although the structure varies in kind. A Montessori-type program allows children to work with materials they select for as long as they wish. The range of materials available and the prescribed ways of using the materials provide structure for their work. A traditional nursery school program may have a wider variety of materials and allow children greater diversity in their use. If all children are required to move from activity to activity at a prescribed time the requirement imposes a different kind of structure.

All school settings are structured in some fashion. Children learn to use the available time, materials, and space. Some limits must be set if children are to be secure. A wholesome structure for learning is flexible in providing for individual differences not only in pace of learning but also in style, interest, and range of acceptable learning goals. The structure of a program should support each child's activities, allowing the child to learn at his own pace those things that are important and meaningful for him.

In any discussion of structure in the classroom, one needs to point out that there is structure in the mental development of children. The development of children follows a fairly regular pattern. Individual differences exist in pace and extent of development, but all children go through approximately the same stages. It is relatively simple to identify the stages of physical development of children through an assessment of bodily proportions. Improved nutrition and hygiene have led to some hastening in the pace of physical development in children, yet all children still have to go through similar growth stages. Stages in intellectual development

are also identifiable. The work of Jean Piaget would suggest that in intellectual development, experiences in early learning may hasten the pace of development, but it is doubtful if a child can leap over specific stages. This would suggest that programs in early childhood should be sensitive to a child's stage of development and not try to force him into the mold of more mature behavior.

Appropriate educational experiences in the nursery school and kindergarten may, however, hasten the pace of development. The challenge is not to promote premature learnings better left to later stages, but rather to facilitate learnings that use the full potential of the early childhood stage. Such experiences help the child use what he knows about the world and help him order his knowledge into successively more sophisticated mental structures.

3

Organizing for Learning

THE program of the nursery school or kindergarten can best be described by the ways in which teachers schedule activities and organize their classrooms. Programs for the young child are generally limited to half a school day with teachers having one group of children in the morning and another in the afternoon. There is little difference between what is offered in the morning and afternoon.

The program described in this section is a generalized one and variations will be found in any classroom. It is not offered as a prescription, but as an example of one way teachers may organize learning in a nursery or kindergarten setting. In general, however, certain principles of programming exist. A well-balanced program includes:

1. Time for both quiet and active experiences
2. Opportunities for child-selected as well as teacher-determined activities
3. Opportunities for individual and group activities
4. Flexibility of scheduling so that children may stay with activities which interest them and also, when their interest wanes, move on to other activities.

The schedule which follows describes, somewhat sketchily, a

day in a nursey school or kindergarten. There are, of course, many other ways of organizing a school day, providing an almost infinite variety of possibilities in daily schedules. Some teachers break up each day into short periods and have the children move through all the school activities together. This has the disadvantage of not allowing children to get deeply involved in an activity in which they have a personal interest and often leaves little or no room to deal with individual differences within the class. Other teachers break their day into only three periods: an indoor activity period, a "group time," and an outdoor activity period. The use of large blocks of time allows for maximum flexibility.

A schedule, however, provides only a framework within which the teacher organizes classroom activity. While schedules can support meaningful teaching, they do not ensure that good teaching will occur. Some days may also vary from a planned schedule as teachers modify their program to meet the learning needs of their class or to carry on special projects. The organization of a school day will be very different for a group of three-year-olds entering nursery school for the first time and for a group of competent five-year-olds who are experienced in the ways of the school.

Example of a Daily Schedule

A nursery school or kindergarten morning might be organized in the following manner:

8:15-8:45 a.m. Teacher planning and preparation.

8:45-9:00 a.m. Arrival.

The children enter the classroom at various intervals during a prescribed arrival time. Spaced entry allows the teacher to greet each child individually and provides the children with an opportunity to make a gradual transition from home to school. During the arrival period children may browse through books or work with manipulative materials. They are also able to view displays on the bulletin board or science table.

9:00-9:20 a.m. Group time.

During this period the teacher may sit with the entire group to plan the day. He describes the available activities and takes care of necessary routines such as attendance check. Group time may also include discussions on a variety of topics. At the beginning of the year a "sharing" period might be appropriate if the children do not take the initiative in discussions. Once skills in group discussion are developed, the limited "sharing" period can be eliminated.

9:20-10:10 a.m. Activity period.

A large block of time is set aside for a variety of learning activities. During this period the children are given a choice of activities and may change at any time. Many of the children may be working independently of the teacher, individually, or in small groups. The teacher may work with a single child or a small group, or he may supervise the entire room. Some children may take part in an arts and crafts activity, some in dramatic play. Other children may be working with manipulative materials. Still others may be working at a sand table or a water basin, or be involved in a planned science experience. All these activities are under the general guidance of the teacher even though he obviously cannot be directly concerned with the close supervision of each of them.

10:10-10:30 a.m. Cleanup, snack, and rest.

After an activity period, children are encouraged to clean their play and work space and put away the materials they have been using. This cleanup is as much a learning experience as the activities themselves; thus, the teacher allows adequate time in his schedule for it. It is helpful if the teacher has his room organized to support the children's independence of operation, with storage space for materials close by the area of use. Often young children need an assigned time for going to the bathroom and washing. Desirable procedures in this connection may also have to be learned.

Young children benefit from a snack and an informal rest period at midmorning. Milk or fruit juice and crackers are often provided. This period offers another opportunity for learning. Informal discussions can be stimulated, new food can be tasted, and children can become aware of the characteristics and functions of the things used, can practice social amenities, assume responsibilities, and learn skills of cooperation. In some classrooms, rather than have a specified time for all children to snack, food and equipment are available as desired in an appropriate location.

Many nursery schools and kindergartens have formal rest periods in midmorning with children lying prone on rugs and mats. While this may be necessary for the very young, formal rest is often carried far beyond the needs of the children. In some kindergartens, it is possible to see more physical activity during the rest period, in the form of wriggling and squirming, than during the activity period. Often the substitution of a period of quiet activity, such as listening to a story or record, is more relaxing.

10:30-11:00 a.m. Music and story time.

A period of time is set aside for activities involving the entire class. Young children enjoy and benefit from group singing. They also can engage in rhythmic activities that allow them to explore the elements

of rhythm, tempo, pitch, and style in music as well as to experience the use of their own bodies for creative expression. The concern here is more with enjoyment, exploration, and the experience itself than with the development of a finished product.

Stories also play a vital role in the nursery school and kindergarten. Teachers read from picture books or anthologies, show films and filmstrips, and play records. They tell stories with puppets, flannel board figures, or with no props at all. Children are also encouraged to tell their own stories or to act them out.

11:00-11:25 a.m. Outdoor activity time.

During this period children are encouraged to climb, run, jump, and make use of wheel toys and large pieces of equipment. Sand and water play are also included. The amount of time spent out-of-doors will probably vary with the climate and the opportunities children have to use the out-of-doors productively at home. When weather is suitable, many indoor activities may be pursued out-of-doors. If outdoor equipment is not available, teachers may plan games and activities that involve physical action.

11:25-11:45 a.m. Preparation and dismissal.

The children leave informally in the same manner in which they arrived. Children need time to get ready and to collect their things before departing for home. If parents are expected to pick up their children, this time provides an excellent opportunity for mini-conferences and informal chats about the children.

11:45 a.m.-Noon. Teacher cleanup period.

The teacher uses the time at the end of the morning to reorder his room, to take care of records, and to confer with staff.

Interest Centers

Another way of describing nursery or kindergarten organization is to describe the interest centers in the room. In many nursery schools or kindergartens, the classroom is divided into areas, each of which supports some portion of the program through the organization of space and the availability of materials and equipment. While the centers will expand or contract with the needs of the program, most of the centers will always be available for use by children.

Arts and crafts center. An important part of the program is the use of arts and crafts material—paints, paper, scissors, crayons, clay, finger paints, modeling dough, and whatever else the creative teacher can find for children to use in developing skills of working

with varied materials and exploring the possibilities for visual and tactile expression. A well-organized center allows the children maximum independence. It also is near a source of water and is organized to facilitate simple cleanup.

Dramatic play center. A miniature playhouse with mock sink, stove, and refrigerator scaled to children's size is usually found in the classroom. This center also contains tables and chairs, doll beds and dolls, pots, pans, dishes, and silverware to enable the children to act out adult familial roles. The addition of dress-up clothes for both boys and girls helps stimulate house play. Other kinds of dramatic play are also supported by the teacher. A supermarket, bus, airplane, or any other media for dramatic play can be set by the teacher as he provides the children with information through books, films, and field trips, and as he supports the play with appropriate dress-up clothes and necessary props.

Block building center. Traditionally two kinds of blocks have been developed for early childhood: the smaller wooden unit blocks, resembling lengths of 2″ x 4″s and the larger wooden floor blocks. often hollow in construction to make them light enough for children's easy handling. Variations of these two types have been developed and are suitable for school use. Cardboard blocks are often purchased by budget-conscious administrators. While they are less expensive than blocks made of wood, they lack the necessary stability to be used constructively by children. The unit blocks can be used by children to create abstract designs and constructions or to reconstruct their world symbolically. If the latter is a goal, then a variety of props, such as trucks and miniature people, can help to extend children's play. The larger blocks can be used to build things that children can use in their dramatic play, such as the supermarket, bus, or airplane already discussed. Adequate floor space is necessary for productive block building.

Manipulative materials center. One area of the nursery or kindergarten room is set aside as a place where children may use manipulative materials. These include puzzles, parquetry blocks, lotto games, peg sets, and a host of other table toys.

Library center. This area is placed in a relatively quiet section of the room. Picture story books are attractively displayed in a setting designed to invite browsing. In some modern early childhood classrooms, the library center also includes sets of pictures, filmstrips and viewers, and a listening center which consists of a tape recorder or phonograph with individual headsets.

This arrangement allows children to listen to recorded material without disturbing others.

Music center. A space is set aside with records and a phonograph as well as musical instruments and props to be used in rhythmic activities. Children may use this area during an activity period. It may also be used for total class activity.

Display center. Bulletin boards and tables are set up to display children's work, things they bring from home, or special material the teacher wishes the children to see. A holiday or a recent news event of significance to the children may become the topic of such a display. Displays are related to ongoing activities of the class and are changed often.

Additional centers. Teachers may wish to add various other centers, such as areas for sand and water play or for apparatus in support of large muscle activity. Whether the teacher has these in his classroom is determined by the resources available to him as well as the size of the room and the availability of other space for such purposes. A woodworking area with a work table, hammers, saws, and other tools and an adequate supply of soft wood is another center that is available in many classrooms.

Other Nursery or Kindergarten Activities

In addition to regularly scheduled activities, many opportunities for special or occasional experiences can be planned. Trips play a vital role in early childhood programs. Because the young child is still dependent upon firsthand experiences for much of his knowledge, trips offer the teacher an opportunity to extend the child's learning horizons.

To be of maximum benefit, trips need to be carefully planned and children prepared in advance, both for the mechanics of the trip and the experience itself. Follow-up activities in the classroom add to the total impact of a trip.

Resource people and mobile displays can also be included in classroom activities to add to the range of opportunities children have for firsthand learning experiences. Often the vocations and hobbies of parents and friends provide a wealth of such program material.

Much emphasis is placed in many early childhood classes on celebration of holidays and the passing of the seasons. While at-

tention to holidays can be very important in helping children learn the traditions of their country and community, there is a danger in overworking the educational potential of the holidays and in providing children with stereotypes they will have to unlearn later.

Programs for Children with Special Needs

While the elements already described represent general practice in nursery and kindergarten programs, modifications are often suggested for groups of children with special needs. Physically handicapped young children can participate in many of these activities, but special equipment may need to be provided for their use. In some programs for deaf children, a basic nursery program is provided for a small group, while individuals are taken out for short periods of special training. Programs for retarded children often stress perceptual training and the learning of basic techniques of personal care. Programs for these children often attempt to break down complex tasks into simpler parts for more effective learning.

The largest single population group for which modifications in the nursery and kindergarten education are suggested is that of the disadvantaged. While the population identified as disadvantaged is actually composed of many different subgroups, they have some common characteristics. They generally have a lower "success ratio" than other children and may lack basic learning, language, and intellectual skills. Often such children suffer from their own negative self-images.

The predominant modifications currently offered to disadvantaged children in nursery school and kindergarten consist of the addition of health, nutrition, and social services. Smaller classes and additional staff are also suggested to provide greater opportunity for individual attention. In addition, greater stress is being placed in some situations on language and intellectual activities. Efforts are also made to try to ensure greater success in school activities.

A range of experimental programs has been developed for working with disadvantaged children, some of which have been well publicized. At this writing, however, there is little evidence of greater success in achieving educational goals through these programs than through a modified nursery and kindergarten program.

Programs and Learning

In this section, stress has been placed on the description of organization and activities in the nursery school and kindergarten rather than on the specific learning goals to be achieved.

A characteristic of many of the nursery and kindergarten activities is that the same activity can be used to achieve diverse goals. A three-year-old working with unit blocks is practicing eye-hand coordination as he matches blocks and places one block upon another so that his structure does not topple. A five-year-old is achieving much more sophisticated goals as he uses the same blocks to reconstruct his neighborhood with buildings, thoroughfares, and vehicular traffic. Each of these activities could be described as block play, but each has a significantly different content and learning goals.

Because of the openness of the materials and activities used in early childhood education, a range of program possibilities exists. Moreover, the presence of all the needed equipment does not in itself guarantee a good program. In some schools, a well-equipped classroom can be found in which a very poor program is being conducted. In other situations, great learning opportunities are made available to children under less than ideal circumstances. The teacher, as the person responsible for setting goals, planning programs, and working with the children, can often transcend the physical limitations of a classroom. The competence of the teacher is probably more important at the early childhood level than at any other level of education.

4

Parent Programs in Early Childhood Education

A RENEWED interest in working with parents of young children has recently developed. To some extent, this is a by-product of the new programs for the disadvantaged. Yet it is becoming more generally accepted that the work of the nursery school and kindergarten is incomplete unless there is a strong relationship between the education the child is receiving in school and the opportunities for experiences provided in his home. Such a relationship is only possible when teacher and parent consider themselves partners working together for the welfare of the child.

The concern for working with the parents of children in early childhood programs is not new in the field. Early kindergarten educators considered the union of school and family life indispensable. The first nursery schools were planned near the homes of the children served in order to promote good home-school relations. In many of the kindergartens organized in the United States before the turn of the century, the teacher worked with children only in the morning so that his afternoons could be

devoted to working with parents and home visits. This pattern of dividing the kindergarten teacher's working day into a time for children and a time for parents continued in some communities into the 1950's. Kindergarten associations and mothers' clubs also played a role in the establishment of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers. To this day, attendance at most elementary school PTA meetings is heavily weighted with parents of kindergarten and primary pupils.

The goals of parent programs in early childhood education vary greatly. Many programs are designed to enable both teachers and parents to improve their understanding of the child in question and to work as partners in supporting and guiding his development. Some parent programs are designed to teach skills and activities that enable parents to prepare their children more effectively for school learning. Other programs are primarily public-relations oriented, designed to build community support for the school. Some schools use the children's program primarily as a means of contact with the parents and work with concerns of the parents that may only be remotely connected with the parent-child relationship.

Current Procedures for Working with Parents

Traditionally the procedures used in working with parents have been aimed at providing avenues of communication between home and school. These include the following:

Parent-teacher conferences. One of the most widely used practices, the individual parent-teacher conference, is ideal for increasing understanding about the individual child. Conferences may be scheduled periodically during the school year or may be requested by parent or teacher when necessary. In an individual conference, it is important that communication be open. This means that the teacher must listen to the parent rather than spend all his time reporting. Successful conferences require planning by the teacher, both in thinking through the areas to be covered in the conference and in preparing specific information about the child's activities.

Group meetings. Often meetings begin even before the child enrolls in school when his parents are invited to attend an orientation session. The parents' association of the school may also de-

velop a series of group meetings related to topics of general interest. These meetings may take the form of a lecture, a film showing, or the presentation of a panel of experts.

Smaller group meetings of general interest may also be developed for the parents of a single class. Often these relate to the children's program or to problems specific to this group of parents. Study or interest groups may also be organized around a topic that may not be of general interest but that is of concern to a number of parents. Group meetings may also be purely social in nature, such as a "coffee" or a potluck supper. Such meetings give parents an opportunity to become better acquainted and so are important in developing cohesiveness in the parents' group.

Home visits. When sensitively done, home visits can provide the basis for a rich relationship between school and home. If the parent is not put on the defensive and if the visit is well planned, the home visit is an opportunity for parent and teacher to talk in an atmosphere that is less awesome than in a school building. It also can give the teacher greater insight into the home environment of the child, and enable him to plan opportunities for experiences that are more appropriate both for the child and for the parent.

Letters and news media. Personal notes about daily happenings or progress in the school life of an individual child, personal invitations to conferences and meetings, a newsletter for parents, and the inclusion of articles in local newspapers about school activities are some of the ways the teacher can communicate with parents. Parents, too, can use some of these same procedures to communicate with the teacher. A note for the teacher that comes to school pinned to the child's clothing is not an uncommon occurrence.

Unlike the procedures for parent-teacher interaction, the use of letters and news media provides a one-way avenue of communication. Misunderstandings or differences in interpretation cannot be dealt with immediately as in a conference or group meeting, and therefore greater care is needed in planning these communications to parents.

New Emphases in Working with Parents

While the various techniques discussed here provide improved communication between school and home, they are not constant enough or potent enough to allow parents and schools

to influence each other. In recent years, new interactional patterns between home and school have developed. Examples of some of these interaction patterns are presented here.

Parent cooperative nursery schools. Parent cooperatives have been in existence since the 1920's, but their greatest growth probably occurred in the mid-1950's. Many parents are attracted to the cooperative nursery school by its reduced cost of education made possible because parents perform many of the services for which other schools must pay. However, its chief value is in the close relationship between home and school. Often in conjunction with the child's entry into the school, parents are enrolled in a child study course. Such a course can equip parents with increased knowledge about the normal development of children and increased insight into their own child-rearing practices and the consequences of some of these practices. Included in the course may also be techniques of working with children in groups. In some cooperatives, parents cannot enroll their child unless they have attended such a course.

The increased knowledge the parents gain is useful in school as well as home, since parents often participate, under the guidance of qualified personnel, in the teaching of the children in the nursery school. In addition, the parents, as owners of the school, set policy and hire and supervise the teachers. Such a relationship between teacher and parent requires a teacher to be competent in his work with parents as well as with children.

Similar in operation to the parent cooperative are the PTA-sponsored kindergartens that may arise in communities where public school programs do not include kindergarten education. In these kindergartens the relationship between teacher and parent will parallel that found in a cooperative.

Parent participation in Head Start. One of the most difficult, most controversial, and often most satisfying elements in the current Head Start program has been the insistence that programs for children also involve their parents. This involvement includes participation of parents on advisory boards of the program and participation in working with groups of children in the classroom. The underlying assumption is that parents from the poorer communities can learn much through their involvement with teachers, other workers, and children. In addition, the parents provide a resource to the program and have much to offer that a teacher from outside the neighborhood does not have.

In some programs, parent participation is preceded by orienta-

tion sessions in which the necessary skills in working with children are introduced. Parents are also expected to learn on the job. Where parent participation goes beyond mere custodial functioning in the classroom, a real learning opportunity exists. The informal interaction of teacher and parent provides a constant communication of information and insights. Parents can also learn techniques of dealing with children by watching the teacher in action. Much of what is learned by parents in the Head Start classroom can be transferred to the home.

Parent-child centers. Under the auspices of various agencies, parent-child centers are being developed to provide an educational experience that affects both the child and the home. In the Chicago Public Schools, four such centers have been developed. Children at ages three through five are enrolled in order that the school can work with the child over a long period of time. Parents are also enrolled in and are expected to attend special weekly classes. In addition to the children's classrooms, a special setting for parents' groups is available, equipped with kitchen and laundry appliances so that homemaking skills as well as child-rearing practices and problems can be included in the program.

Parent-child centers are presently being developed under Office of Economic Opportunity sponsorship to serve families of the poor. These centers are designed for families with children below nursery school age, even including children as young as one year old. The general concern is to meet the needs of an age level usually not served by any institution. Each center is conceived somewhat differently and may provide different services, depending upon the needs of the community.

Other parent education programs. In addition to programs in which parents help to make policy as well as receive information, there are many other parent education programs. Some of these exist independent of children's programs as part of adult education courses in child-rearing, child development, or general homemaking. Others are closely related to the education of the young child. In the program for disadvantaged children at Peabody College, for example, a number of techniques for teaching parents ways of working with their children at home were developed under the direction of Susan Gray. These are primarily aimed at assisting parents in teaching their children those skills that would help them become more successful in school.

The Nurseries in Cross Cultural Education program developed

at San Francisco State College under the direction of Mary B. Lane, involves parents in its activities with the aim that the parents, in time, will be able to operate the program themselves. While parents are not obligated to be involved, they are invited into the nursery classes, with arrangements made for the younger children as well. Parents are also involved in making many important decisions about the operation of the school.

At the University of Florida, under the direction of Ira J. Gordon, a research project to provide children in disadvantaged environments with early stimulation through parent education is presently being tested. Parent educators are drawn from the same population that is the target of the program and are specially trained for this work. They visit the homes of young children and work directly with the parents, teaching them specific activities to use with their infants. This program differs from similar ones in other institutions in that it works with parents of children as young as three weeks old and continues for several years, providing different activities for the children as they mature. As in many other programs in the field, it is still too early to assess the long-range effects of such early stimulation on development.

At the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee during the summers of 1965-67, a child-parent program for a completely different population was developed by Elizabeth F. Wheeler. Designed primarily for middle-class parents, the program attempted to provide simultaneous education for parents and children. The classroom for children was available for observation by parents, who were also able to confer with the teacher. The parents' program, however, went beyond a concern for child-rearing practices. Calling upon the resources of the University and the community, a program was developed consisting of lectures, discussions, and films which dealt with education, child-rearing, the arts, and community affairs. Such a program was built upon the intellectual and social interests of mothers who wished an opportunity to think about things beyond the world of home and kitchen. They wished to expand their knowledge of current educational ideas and procedures but did not wish to enroll in formal course work in adult education or university programs.

Similar in intent but organized for a disadvantaged population is the parent program of the United Neighborhood Houses in New York City. There, a parents' room is set aside close to the room in which the children's program is held. Another room, "the infantry," is set aside for infants and toddlers too young to be en-

rolled in educational programs. In the parents' room, a club is organized under the guidance of a group leader. The program of the club is determined by the parents themselves and session topics may range from household concerns to community problems. The club works closely with other agencies so that the leader can counsel parents into vocational or general education programs. In addition, discussions of the club may lead to action of the parents outside the club setting, either in the neighborhood or in the wider arena of municipal politics.

At the University of Illinois, under the direction of Bernard Spodek, another kind of parent program has developed. Growing out of the needs of disadvantaged mothers, the program was less concerned with child-rearing than with the vocational interests or needs of parents. The program provided parents with the skills needed to work as teacher aides, day care aides, and family day care workers. Where necessary, general education, aimed at helping the women qualify for a high school equivalence diploma, was offered in cooperation with the Urbana Public Schools.

The three programs described here have had one thing in common. They have attempted to work with parents in areas of concern that go beyond the traditional homemaking and child-rearing practices or basic parent-child relationships. They each have viewed the parent as a person with broad interests and concerns, all of which are related in some way to the basic role of parent. This extension of parent programming beyond the traditional forms of parent education opens new possibilities for parent roles in education.

Potentialities and Limitations in Parent Programming

New approaches to parent programming in early childhood education have developed and educators need to become aware of the limitations existing within these programs. We glibly speak about educating parents, for example, but we are generally concerned only with mothers. Perhaps we have not learned to reach fathers or perhaps our society does not identify a truly active role for the father. Parent programs, with the exception of some involvement in PTA, are overwhelmingly female-oriented phenomena.

Another limitation in parent programming is its voluntary nature. Parents generally do not attend sessions unless they wish to. However, requiring parental participation may have kept young

children out of programs for which they have great need. Thus, the voluntary nature of parent programming also demands that programs be of high, immediate interest or meet some pressing need of parents. Otherwise, attendance in a parent program will wane.

The need to work with parents is not a class-based phenomenon. Parent programs should be designed for middle-class parents as well as for disadvantaged. The organization, sponsorship, and content of the program, however, will vary with the interests and desires of the parents and their ability to participate fully and easily. It is vital that developers of parent programs involve parents in the planning. Otherwise, they may find their programs unsuccessful without ever realizing why.

5

Personnel in Early Childhood Programs

WITH the expansion of early childhood education, the search for competent teaching staff has become intense. Not only are there suddenly more jobs than there are trained people, but the difference in staffing arrangements between early childhood and later elementary programs has given rise to much confusion about staff roles and qualifications. This confusion is heightened by the absence in many states of teacher certification requirements at the early childhood level. This situation needs clarification in support of new policies in public schools and state education agencies.

Staffing Patterns in Early Childhood Classes

Kindergartens in public schools have often been staffed by a single teacher. The typical kindergarten class size is generally set at between 20 and 30 children, with the recommendation that

classes be kept as close to the lower figure as possible. In reality, kindergarten classes have often been allowed to increase in size well beyond the limit of 30. Because the kindergarten child can generally assume responsibility for his own needs, one teacher has been able to handle a kindergarten class by himself. Such a pupil-teacher ratio often results in a heavy emphasis on total class participation in all activities. In classes for the disadvantaged and for children with special needs, the class size is often smaller, and auxiliary personnel are added.

In the nursery school, class size is smaller, and there are generally at least two teachers to a room. Fifteen three-year-olds are a typical learning group, as are 18 to 20 four-year-olds. Each group usually has a professional teacher and an assistant. In programs for the disadvantaged, three or more adults may comprise the staff for a group of 15 children. Increasing the size of the staff permits increased individual attention and a program with richer and more varied activities.

The teacher. The teacher in a nursery school or kindergarten should, of course, have professional preparation. A college degree in teacher education, with work designed specifically to prepare him to teach young children, is imperative. Programs for the preparation of teachers vary, but the course work generally consists of child development, methods and curriculum of early childhood education, as well as a sound general education. The teacher should also have had an opportunity to be an intern or student teacher practicing for a period under the supervision of a competent, experienced teacher. Nursery or kindergarten teachers are usually women, but it is highly desirable to have men also working as teachers of young children.

The teacher's role is a professional one. It is his responsibility to plan the program and coordinate the efforts of all persons involved. The key element in the teacher's role is his ability to make professional decisions. He must be able to diagnose children's learning abilities and deficits and to plan programs based upon the needs of the children and the goals of the program. He also has the responsibility for evaluating the achievement of these goals. Although the teacher spends much of his time working directly with children, he may delegate portions of this responsibility to others.

The assistant teacher. Working under the guidance of the professional teacher is the assistant teacher or teacher aide. Usu-

ally, this person is not professionally prepared. He may have completed a two-year junior college course or he may have learned his skills in workshops or orientation training programs. Often assistants receive no formal training but learn on the job under supervision. Some programs allow the assistant to have responsibility only for the custodial functions in the classroom. This can be wasteful of human talent. Assistant teachers, even those with only a high school education, can learn some of the technical aspects of teaching and, under guidance, can learn to work effectively with children.

In addition to the paid assistant teacher, volunteers may also be used in the class. The volunteer may be a parent of a child in the program or may come from outside the community. He must be willing to work under supervision and to fit into the framework of the classroom. The volunteer must be willing to adhere to a schedule of regular attendance. A training program for volunteers is extremely helpful. Also, some method of screening volunteers, either before they begin to work with children or shortly thereafter, is necessary.

Ancillary personnel. In addition to the teacher and his aide, many other persons may be called upon to work with the children and their families. It is crucial that the work of all specialists be coordinated. The professionally trained teacher occupies the key position in coordination.

Social workers may be used in a program to work directly with families and parent groups or to provide liaison with welfare agencies. While the social worker is an important adjunct to the program, his contact with the family does not substitute for the parent-teacher conference. There is always a danger, for one thing, that the teacher's message will be garbled when transmitted through an intermediary.

Psychologists are useful in making assessments of children through observation or testing, providing additional information to the teacher, or recommending use of additional resources. Health personnel, including doctors, dentists, and nurses, may also be involved in the program. At times special community coordinators or family workers are available. Special teachers and therapists may be called in to deal with particular problems. In some programs, the cooks, custodians, and drivers are used by the teacher in extending his service to children.

Since each person sees the program from his own professional

perch, the head teacher, as the leader, must maintain a broad perspective in coordinating the work of all.

Preparation of Personnel

Early childhood education has long been the stepchild of teacher preparing institutions in the United States. Until recently, there were not many jobs available for early childhood teachers. Many states required only a high school education for a license to operate a nursery school or kindergarten. Furthermore, some states did not require certification for early childhood teachers. Programs preparing teachers of the young were, therefore, often either ignored or held in low esteem.

Into this vacuum came the child development programs initiated by many schools of home economics. Established to provide high-level pre-parent education or to develop persons trained with a knowledge of growth patterns of children, these programs often operated nursery schools. To meet their needs for trained nursery school teachers, they began to employ their own graduates. Subsequently, many of these programs have become producers of able nursery school teachers to meet the needs of the larger community.

However, since the development of Head Start and the extension of kindergarten education in public schools, colleges of education have become aware of the expanding need for professional personnel. Too often public school regulations have forced schools to staff programs for the young with teachers who have been prepared to work with older children. Often totally unprepared persons have been given provisional certificates so that some adult could be in the classroom. At the same time, competent persons without the necessary formal qualifications have not been hired or have been used only in the role of assistant.

The teacher of young children needs to be professionally prepared. He needs preparation that readies him for work with young children in the role of teacher. Neither a knowledge of techniques appropriate for older children nor a knowledge of the natural progression of childhood is adequate. The assistant teacher also needs to be trained. While his preparation need not have the depth required for the teacher, adequate training would allow assistant teachers to fill their role more capably.

With the present concern for early childhood education, it is hoped that more teacher education institutions will begin to offer new programs aimed at preparing teachers of young children. It

is also hoped that the junior colleges will accept their responsibility in the preparation of assistant teachers through terminal programs or programs that could ultimately lead to full professional status.

Such new programs in early childhood teacher education should experiment with content and organization. An attempt should be made to break away from some of the traditional elements of teacher education and to develop new programs particularly appropriate for teachers of young children.

6

Evaluation of Early Childhood Programs

THERE are many aspects of the nursery or kindergarten program to be evaluated and many problems in the evaluation. One can evaluate the curriculum or the style of teaching. One can evaluate the effect of a program on the development of a child or the degree to which attendance in a program leads to greater academic achievement in later years. One can also evaluate a nursery or kindergarten program as an experience for children without any regard for the consequences of the program. Each of these is a legitimate form of evaluation. Each suggests different priorities in education.

The Nursery or Kindergarten as a Good Place for Children To Be

Traditionally, early childhood educators have shunned evaluation on the basis of external criteria. Just as few elementary educators would judge the quality of an elementary school wholly

on the basis of the achievement of its graduates in secondary school, so nursery educators have shunned the evaluation of the nursery school solely on whether children who attended do better in elementary school than those who did not. In addition, since the goals of nursery and kindergarten education are seen as different from those of primary and secondary education, such a judgment would be invalid. The achievement of a child in the primary grades is as much a function of what happens in those grades as of his experiences prior to this period. Thus, it is difficult to keep the effects of nursery education separate from the effects of subsequent experiences in such long-term evaluation.

Early childhood educators, therefore, have remained consistently concerned with internal evaluation of their programs. A lack of useful evaluation instruments has significantly limited the kinds of evaluation that can be made. Serious problems relating to the validity and reliability of instruments, as well as the range of potential test error and limits on the practicality of test administration with young children, also create problems. In general, only gross consequences of programs can be reported.

Often early childhood educators have simply judged the value of a program by the closeness with which it has conformed to a generally accepted model of nursery or kindergarten education. If certain standard pieces of equipment were available and if the teacher behaved in acceptable ways, the program was judged a good one. Obviously judgments based upon such criteria also leave much to be desired. The alternative position stated by some educational psychologists, that programs be evaluated solely upon evidence of changes in observable behavior, has its limitations, too. Not all the goals of education can be stated in terms of observable behavior. In addition, reliance on sample behavior in artificial test situations is unsatisfactory.

Guidelines for Evaluation

No foolproof method for evaluation of early childhood programs exists. However, certain guidelines can help the practitioner make an adequate assessment of a nursery or kindergarten program. The content of this report presents certain goals and curriculum elements that are generally accepted for inclusion in a nursery or kindergarten program. In addition to these elements, the following set of questions may help in making evaluative

judgments and in encouraging the development of better instruments of evaluation:

What are the goals of the program?

Are the goals broadly conceived, yet attainable?

Is the curriculum established for the program consistent with the stated goals?

Are the opportunities for experiences provided the children challenging and at the same time suitable for the age range of the children involved?

Does the teacher use a variety of instructional methods?

Do the methods of instruction allow for personal exploration and individual freedom?

Is play used to support children's learning?

Are the children free of undue pressure in the program?

Do the instructional methods used help children learn to think?

Are the children treated with respect?

Is the program organized to allow for individual differences in pace, style, and range of learning?

Are the children helped to become independent?

How effective is the program in achieving its total range of goals?

Is the environment a good one for children to live in?

In making a program evaluation, a variety of kinds of information ought to be gathered. Information may consist of observations and records made by the teacher, achievement on standardized tests, and direct observation by the evaluator of classroom practice. When observing in the classroom, it is useful to have an observational schedule, a checklist, or a set of specific questions to guide observation.

The evaluator must make a judgment about the nature of the program as well as its implementation through teaching. The judgment must go beyond the effectiveness of the program to consider the worth of its goals. Finally, the evaluator must answer the basic question: Is this a good learning experience for children?

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